

JONI MITCHELL LIVE TONITE

by GARY KOZAK

Joni Mitchell's autobiographical lyrics tell her own story; from age 24 to 32 on the music scene. She came in a time when, for all its individuality, the rock music scene lacked the personal touch. The damsel with the dulcimer has surfaced a new school of talented female singers. The personalized songs they sing are like voyages of self-discovery, keen in observation, startling in the impact of their poetry. The musical scene, a world of male groups, of pounding thunderous music that drowned out the words needed the feminine touch and it got it.

At 24, with "Both Sides Now," she ranked as one of the best young composers in the business. "Both Sides Now," like the rest of her early compositions, was flawless. She never recorded the song herself--her fluty, vanilla-fresh voice with its haunting, pastoral quality took time to catch on, while friends like Judy Collins Buffy Sainte-Marie and Tom Rush were singing her tunes and lyrics.

Joni seriously took up music only five years before. A native of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, she casually began playing the ukelele at 20, and drifted into folk music. In Toronto, she worked as a sales girl to earn the union fee so that she could perform in city cafes for \$15 a night. Success was still out of sight when she met, married and eventually divorced folks singer Chuck Mitchell in Detroit. Meanwhile, she had taken the first step out of oblivion by starting to write her own folk-styled songs.

With unemployed guitarist David Crosby she worked on the intricate system of guitar tunings that now makes her music difficult to duplicate.

The different tunings came when she encountered the F chord, a nemesis of guitar novices. She developed an open F chord that had a deeper, richer sound. New, unique chords were possible, and because they would be formed simply by moving one finger between different frets, intricate eight-note-to-the-bar finger picking seemed easy. Only two of her first 45 recorded guitar songs are played in standard concert tuning, and some songs like "I Don't Know Where I Stand" and "The Dawntreader," are impossible to play on a normally tuned guitar.

With the decline of the heavy metal sound in San Francisco, a new generation was "getting it together," and Joni Mitchell wrote its anthem, "Woodstock," which made her a celebrity. Her discerning intelligence had special appeal for men bored by beach bunnies and hard-line feminists. James Taylor, Leonard Cohen, David Crosby and Jackson Browne came calling, and fell hopelessly in love.

As in the past, Joni Mitchell's experiences produced sensitive songs. Blue, a fourth and transitional album, produced the un-

matched and undivided criticism that placed her with Dylan and Baez among legends. In the meantime her forays into her private life had had little effect on her song-writing. Then Rolling Stone published a chart of the rock scene showing her suspected lovers. The spotlight became too bright. The impressionistic watercolors of her early emotions in "Chelsea Morning," "Woodstock," and "Big Yellow Taxi" began to run. Her life, once viewed as life imitating art, began to transcend her freedom as versus the men in her life. The girl of "Ladies of the Canyon," who

mong contemporaries. Isolation, responsibility and success are recurring subjects in her songs, many of which inductively focus on a part of society. "Big Yellow Taxi's" Malthusian look at the environment and "Free Man in Paris" harried-executive portrait lead to larger conclusions about basic motives and drives.

Like Carole King, she comes at us when we're rethinking our lifestyles. Suddenly women didn't want to shine like stars in a male universe--they wanted to be just who they were. Joni wrote this in "I Had a King" after her separation and divorce: "I can't go back there any more/You know my keys won't fit the door/You know my thoughts don't fit the man/They never can they never can."

She turned inward. Unlike a rock madonna Carly Simon or paper-thin Melanie, she began to measure the despair of a woman torn between traditional domesticity and unfettered feminism.

When other female songwriters were telling us about the universal world of woman in rather adolescent terms, Joni wrote in "Trouble Child," after some unnatural times of her own, "So what are you going to do about it/You can't live life and you can't leave it/Advice and religion--you can't take it/You can't seem to believe it/The peacock is afraid to parade/You're under the thumb of the maid/You really can't give love in this condition/Still you know how you need it." She can show more passions when she is "artless" with control over lyrics.

Most of the female songwriters give you a freedom to feel. Joni has the ability to choose the important issues and magnify them sensitively, sharply. Others know that there is more happiness and more pain inside ourselves than we ever come to verbalize, sometimes even to know. Joni's superiority is registered in the weight of her freedom against several suitors in these lines: "Now she rallies her defences/

Music

every 19 year old college girl wanted to be, was no longer as sweet as flowers and teddy bears in a bedroom. She began to speak more freely about a lot of the lovers she had. She refused to couch her feelings in chic or cultural terms. She remained a good poet and maintained her following. In "Woman of Heart and Mind" in Court and Spark, she wrote, "I'm looking for affection and respect/A little passion/And you want stimulation--nothing more/That's what I think/But you know I'll try to be there for you/When your spirits start to sink."

Always contradictory, she has become more prolific with her music as time and experience have worn on. Everyone seems to know her by now, the reticent feminist who by trial and error has charted the male as well as the female ego.

Youth's silent rebellion in "Let the Wind Carry Me," the juxtaposition of innocence and experience in "Both Sides Now," and the suburban frustrations of "The Arrangement" are messages that make her relevant a-

For she fears that one will ask her/For eternity/And she's so busy being free." Joni not only realizes that there is happiness and pain, she wants to get inside of it. "If you are sad, then you should feel sad. The French are good at that. They show what they feel and in that way purge themselves of it. She gets into the pain of the heart.

More recently she has become sentimental in her journeys and experiences, especially in "The Hissing of Summer Lawns." Joni continues to be rock'n'roll's woman of heart and mind.

Her sheer romance for words are never better than in this pure impressionism from "The Dawntreader:" Peridots and periwinkle blue medallions/Gilded galleons spilled across the ocean floor," or, "Varnished weeds in window jars/Tarnished beads on tapestries/Kept in satin boxes are Reflections of love's memories."



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